

# **The Freeing of Anglican Identities**

## **A Proposal Submitted to The Eames Commission**

**By The Reverend Dr. Lorraine Cavanagh**

I have written this paper because I believe that a possibility exists for developing new attitudes and ways of thinking about the unity of the Anglican Communion. The difficulties which the Communion is experiencing with regard to the present conflict indicate that superficial and shallow notions of unity are inadequate in a dispute in which conflicting loyalties and deep convictions are at stake, and that a new understanding of unity is needed which would help to re-focus its thinking and so prepare the way for renewed dialogue and for a reconciliation which would release the current deadlock.<sup>1</sup> During the course of the discussion, I hope to demonstrate that the difficulties which the Communion is experiencing with regard to resolving this conflict relate to its collective spiritual life and to the way in which its thinking and relationships may not be fully engaged in God at a deep and intuitive level. The discussion therefore aims to discover new and more intuitive ways of thinking about unity, with a view to helping the Commission re-discover a shared meaning for Anglican life, arising from a deeper understanding of the spiritual significance of communion. I have written this paper in the belief that working from an understanding of its spiritual life together might resource the Communion's thinking and relationships in such a way as to help unblock the current static conflict

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<sup>1</sup> I draw on insights and reflections gained during the course of my recent Doctoral research. *Meaning and Transformation in the Life of the Anglican Communion*.

situation. I have also allowed the discussion to form a partial response to Chris Sugden's paper 'What is The Anglican Communion For?'<sup>2</sup>.

## 1. The Theological and Spiritual Implications of the Conflict

Clause 1 of the Mandate issued to the Commission by the Archbishop of Canterbury<sup>3</sup>, suggests the need for discovering a deeper theological meaning for the common life which Anglicans share. Depth of meaning implies that such an understanding has a spiritual basis which, if ignored, risks causing permanent damage to the life of communion. With this in mind, I now turn to some of the implications for the self understanding of Anglicanism, as it has been affected by the current crisis.

To speak of a common life, and of the meaning which informs it, should not be understood as a covert glossing over of difference but, on the contrary, as the basis for inquiring into new ways of thinking which would subsequently permit the life of communion to be strengthened in a mutuality which is based on trust. For this to be possible, theological work would need to be undertaken as a spiritual exercise in the context of relationship. In the first place, in a relationship with God, as the primary act denoting what is meant by 'spiritual', and in the second where this spirituality informs theological debate and restores broken human relationships. Taken together, these initiatives form the prelude to re-establishing a climate of trust in which to address the issues which dominate this conflict.

### *1:1 Mutuality - The Relational as encounter*

The re-establishing of trust in the fractured life of the Anglican Communion will therefore require a costly process of renewed encounter between separated churches and individuals. This does not automatically guarantee the kind of unity

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<sup>2</sup> *The Anglican Communion – Ecumenical Affairs and Studies* Anglican Communion Web Site. 'The Lambeth Commission' <http://eames.anglican-mainstream.net> (as of April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> In particular '...the *theological implications* flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal Church (USA) to elect a priest in a committed same sex relationship as one of its bishops... and the ways in which provinces of the Anglican Communion may relate to one another in situations where the ecclesiastical authorities of one province feel unable to maintain the fullness of communion with another part of the Anglican Communion.' (my italics)

which is described, for example, in *The Virginia Report*.<sup>4</sup> However, the establishment of a climate of trust might initially allow for an understanding of unity which is open to the action of grace and to a transformation of the Communion's common life together in new and surprising ways.

If we initially retain 'holding in tension', albeit a somewhat inadequate description of unity, as a way of evoking solidarity in relationship, we conceive of solidarity as worked out in the free exchange of honour and human affection between people<sup>5</sup>. However, it is an inadequate model of unity for the life of communion since it fails to imply the need for a shared common life which is rooted in the life of the spirit. Furthermore, many people perceive being 'held together in diversity' as no more than a way of describing an outworn and inadequate external structure whose primary function is the maintenance of decline and/or the prevention of total disintegration. This suggests the need for new ways of thinking about unity which embody strength and the possibility for movement, the movement of God's continuing abiding presence sustaining and transforming the life of communion from within.

A unity which is informed by the inner transforming movement of God's Spirit is dynamic and is thereby sustained and enlivened by grace, so that grace becomes the operative force of Jesus Christ at work transforming the life of communion.<sup>6</sup> In being dynamic, and as the force of God's activity in the Church, the introduction of a dynamic of grace adds substance and depth to a unity based on 'holding in diversity'. The transforming work becomes the 'activity' or 'movement' of God's Spirit which 'holds' or embraces separated individuals in such a way as to

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<sup>4</sup> 'One feature of Anglican life is that it holds together diversities of many kinds.' *Being Anglican in the Third Millennium*, 'The Virginia Report', James M. Rosenthal & Nicola Currie (comps.), Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 1996 p.242

<sup>5</sup> Its opposite emerges as what Miroslav Volf describes as 'enculturated bigotry'. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. In terms of the current discussion, enculturation of this sort involves falling back on theological world views pre-formed by personal history and as yet untransformed by the healing process.

<sup>6</sup> I owe this association of grace with the dynamic of the Spirit and the ongoing life of communion to Richard Hooker whose participatory understanding of what it means to be both a social and a historical Church informs much of the following discussion.

enable them to surrender the theological identities which are frequently defined in party or denominational terms. Taken together, the surrender and subsequent embrace might constitute the initial step which needs to be taken towards freeing identities and opening up the current theological *impasse* with which the Commission is faced.<sup>7</sup>

This is not to abstract human identity and self understanding from concrete reality, since the work of transformation needs to be effected in the human life of communion with identities which reflect a person's self understanding, both in relation to God and subsequently in relation to other people. Identities are not simply shaped by an individual's self perception. They grow in a sociological and historical context, one which subsequently informs a person's spiritual life. Identities are therefore 'contextual' and need to remain so if the process of exchange is to lead to the sort of mutuality capable of enriching the whole life of communion.<sup>8</sup> For this to be possible, especially in the face of the risks to the life of communion brought about by outdated or superficial notions of unity, ways need to be found for developing theologies which remain faithful to the historically received teaching of the Church in scripture and tradition but which also derive from a moving or dynamic life experienced by the Church in its inner life of communion.

### *1:2 Mutuality and the collective inner life*

In its historicity and contextuality, this is a life which derives from a deeply contemplative experience of God but it is manifested in the life of the Church as the abiding ongoing (dynamic) presence of Jesus Christ in its relationships. The present climate of conflict denies this contemplative dimension and so prevents it affecting

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<sup>7</sup> Miroslav Volf describes this as 'the drama of embrace' See *Exclusion and Embrace* ch.3 especially pp.140ff.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Hardy defines contextuality as 'the interweaving of human subjects with their cultures and the natural world, and of cultures with each other and the natural world.' See ch.5 'The Spirit of God in Creation and Reconciliation. Introduction: Contextuality and the Trinitarian God' in *God's Ways With the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996 p.68&ff.

the life of communion, with the result that repercussions of the conflict are felt in all areas of the Church's life.<sup>9</sup>

The polarising of issues, and the slogans with which they have become associated, have led to an identity driven agenda dominating the concerns of separated parties in the Communion. This polarisation of identities would seem to indicate not only a paralysis of the human sociality of communion but also of its spiritual life together, since different 'integrities' must find it increasingly difficult to encounter the same God in the same theological and spiritual 'locality'. It is therefore in this area of spirituality – a shared 'locality' where the same God is encountered – that different integrities need to re-encounter one another, an indication of the importance of finding new ways for re-establishing a spiritual basis for the Communion's life together.

## **2. A Spiritual basis for the life of communion**

In the opening remarks to his paper,<sup>10</sup> Chris Sugden compares the Anglican Communion with the 'locality', which represents a new conceptual space in the forum of international relations. This 'anarchic space'<sup>11</sup> is the product of a perceived collective need to experience a solidarity of purpose across international borders in areas of common concern. It is also, he argues, the product of a shift in the nature and locality of conflict – from external conflict which occurs across national divides to internal conflict over divisive issues which polarise national politics but which also acts as a catalyst for those who share common concerns. He compares this situation to the life of the Anglican Communion in which issues which give rise to conflict within denominations also unite people across the boundaries of traditional or liberal churchmanship. Chris Sugden argues that the Anglican Communion, in its

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<sup>9</sup> The conflict permeates the life of the Church at every level. In many parishes we experience it as a continuation in microcosm of the existing hostilities, or in the activism of secular methods and aims dominating parish life.

<sup>10</sup> *op.cit.* p.1

<sup>11</sup> His thinking and the term 'anarchic space' derive from that of Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997

‘permeability’ of relationships, and as it is held together by a structure dependent on a ‘higher’ authority, can be compared to the conceptual space which he has already identified in the sphere of international relations.

### *2:1 Dynamic and locality*

Insofar as the *via media* continues to be seen as the hallmark of Anglican identity, this is a helpful and original re-interpretation of the spirit of Anglicanism. If we understand the ‘middle way’ as signifying neither inconclusive compromise or an unstructured synthesis of ‘inclusive’ theologies but a dynamic holding together of difference in the ongoing life of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we begin to see how Chris Sugden’s use of the concept of locality might help to free Anglicans into a more dynamic unity. It provides Anglicans with a conceptual space in which to forge new friendships. Initially, his use of such concepts as locality and permeability allows for the inherent possibility for movement across existing boundaries in the life of communion. The way in which he employs these terms affords us with a means to think about the ‘permeability’ of different party or denominational contexts, and of the way in which exchanges of understanding and growth in the mutuality of common affection might be occur within the ‘permeability’ of relationships. My own argument suggests that the locality created in such exchanges is also a spiritual one, originating in the Communion’s life together in God.

From the vantage point of a shared and deeper life in God, the ‘permeability’ of Anglicanism becomes one of its greatest strengths, allowing the two-way flow of ideas and of human affection in the honouring of the other in his or her separate integrity. This constitutes a dynamic of exchange which allows the Communion to continually re-work its self understanding in freeing the identities of its members from the constraints of non-dynamic thinking. If, as a result of such an exchange, affection for the other begins to flow from a candid acknowledgment of our shared belonging in Christ, the affection which is engendered in the permeability and dynamic of this exchange might subsequently enable a courageous facing of differences with regard

to the interpretation of God's will and purpose for the Anglican life of communion.<sup>12</sup> Richard Hooker bases his participatory understanding of Church life on a similar premise.

### *2:2 Participation and Dynamic*

For Hooker, God's will and purpose for 'the highest good' is wholly identified with his being, in whom the Church participates in a profoundly Christological and eucharistic sense. His thinking is informed by an understanding of the Church as one which is fully integrated, both in the ongoing dynamic of God's purpose for its highest good and in its relationships. Such an understanding of God, and of the way God works in the life of the Church, derives in turn from an understanding of divine and natural laws as comprising a complimentary system whose source and purpose for the highest good of people is in the dynamic nature of God's own being. That is to say, that God's will and purpose are constitutive of his being. The will and purpose of God is dynamic as a continuing activity which occurs within the movement of historical time and events.

A more intuitive approach to Hooker's thinking, as it derives both from participation in the life of Christ in the Eucharist and in a coherent system of laws, prepares Anglicans today for a deeper and more dynamic understanding of the life of the Spirit in the Church. Hooker's integrative thinking provides us with a conceptual basis for thinking in new ways about Church polity, and about the authority which shapes it into unity. A contemplative reading of Richard Hooker allows us to see the Church as an integrated life of relationships which are continually being transformed by the abiding Spirit of Christ's authority who enables its structure to become a supple and enduring framework holding the Communion together at greater depth. There are some practical inferences which might be drawn from these brief remarks with respect to items 2 and 3 in the Commission's mandate which, unfortunately, fall outside the scope of this paper.

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to deny the fact that a change in the visible nature of the Communion as we now know it may be inevitable.

In the theological and political circumstances of his own day, which were closely related and correspond in many ways to our own, Hooker's thinking was informed by the need to retain a sense of the dynamic nature of history and of the way in which contextuality informs the intellectual process. For this reason, he describes the Church in terms which are both historical and participatory, 'that every former part..give(s) strength unto all that followe.'<sup>13</sup>

Retaining a sense of the dynamic and permeable nature of its life together in Christ allows the Communion to discover greater intensity and depth in its experience of unity. Consistent with Richard Hooker's thinking, this might lead to a greater 'collective'<sup>14</sup> discernment of his will and purpose, especially with respect to the polarising issues which currently divide the Church. Allowing for the social permeability of the life of communion to be transparent to God's action prepares the Communion not only for transformation of its understanding of the issues which divide it, but for a corresponding transformation of its understanding of unity as one which is to be found at the deepest level of human existence in the abiding Spirit of Jesus Christ. It now becomes possible to renew the search for genuine meaning and purpose for the life of Communion in the full expectation that it will be found in new and surprising ways.

### *2:3 Practical Steps*

There are practical steps which the Commission could take towards reaching such a renewed understanding of meaning. These might include: a) regular days set aside for prayer and bible study undertaken in mixed 'denominational' or 'party interest' groups, b) the establishing of a mentoring system whereby spiritual counsellors (not necessarily Anglicans), or those with experience in related areas, might 'walk alongside' each member of the Commission with a view to helping

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<sup>13</sup> *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* [The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker Vols. I & II], W. Speed Hill, (General Ed.); Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1977 I.1:2 Hereafter referred to as *Laws*

<sup>14</sup> A contemplative reading of Richard Hooker, for example, allows his principle of participation, as it applies to the life of the Church, to inform the way in which scripture is read. The reading of scripture becomes, in Hooker's terms, deduced 'by collection' and so allows for the whole Church to acquire a deeper understanding of God's purpose at a pre-rational level. See especially *Laws* I.14:2

individuals re-appraise their own priorities and relationships in the context of the life of communion c) the establishing of a cross-party chaplaincy support team.

### 3. Disunity and Truth

The foregoing discussion constitutes a partial endorsement of Chris Sugden's understanding of the permeability of Anglicanism. To this end, I have sought to indicate the possibilities which the idea of permeability affords for a new and dynamic reconciliation occurring across the party interest lines which divide it. However, although Chris Sugden's argument suggests that he would, in principle, agree with freedom of exchange across the cultural and geographic boundaries which currently delineate the Anglican Communion, he does not in fact allow these boundaries to be transformed into a new 'locality' in which Anglicans might together genuinely re-discover a living and dynamic God in their midst, in and through the way differing integrities perceive and describe him.

This is particularly significant if he is right in alerting us to the endangered nature of provincial autonomy<sup>15</sup>. This, he implies, might eventually be replaced by greater powers of jurisdiction for individual dioceses, in which case freedom of exchange across permeable boundaries will become vital to the continuing health of the Communion.<sup>16</sup> Far from being a vague centralist concept, permeability as a model for future unity requires a clear spiritual, as well as theological, basis on which to build an enduring Anglican ecclesiology for the future.

#### *3:1 Purity and holiness*

However, ideas of permeability and freedom of exchange do not sit comfortably with a definition of the life of communion which ignores the dynamic. The same is true with respect to the historical way in which God has been active in the life of the Church. In both cases, a denial of the dynamic transforming work of God's

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<sup>15</sup> "If the Communion from above breaks down, what will be the impact on the Anglican Communion from below?" 'The Context of the Communion' *op.cit* p.2

<sup>16</sup> Chris Sugden *op. cit* 'What Makes the Communion Anglican?' p.4

will and purpose in the life of communion gives rise to static or non-dynamic definitions of truth. The challenge which permeability poses to new concepts of unity therefore lies in our acceptance or rebuttal of what Chris Sugden terms ‘sub-optimal ethics’. As a reflection of puritan ethical thinking which lends itself to excluding (and exclusive) ideas of virtue, the idea of the ‘sub-optimal’ in relation to the teaching of scripture denies the possibility for deeper and more intuitive collective reading, as well as transformation, in implying a holiness which is, broadly speaking, to be equated with purity and separation.<sup>17</sup>

Much has been said by all parties to the current conflict about the implications and effects of applying (or failing to apply) the social and sexual mores of one historical context to the vastly different contexts of today but the theological implications which this kind of artificial ethics has for the dynamic life of communion merit further consideration. Of primary significance, and in contrast to a dynamic understanding of the life of communion, of which he is elsewhere in favour<sup>18</sup>, Chris Sugden’s paper suggests that central to the process of exchange and growth in the life of communion is the need to define, and thereby enshrine, the concept of truth as permanent and unchanging. In other words, he advocates a truth which has not been independently ‘constructed’.<sup>19</sup> The foregoing discussion suggests that in his understandable reluctance to allow a purely human ‘construction’ of truth, he also allows all talk of truth to be reduced to a non-dynamic, or static, definition of the way God thinks and acts with human beings.

His concerns about the threats posed by individualism and syncretism to a clear and unequivocal understanding of Anglican teaching are in some measure

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<sup>17</sup> This is particularly evident when ‘optimal’ ethics derive implicitly from Levitical purity codes established for sociological (largely hygiene related) as well as theological reasons (the separation of the chosen people from alien cultures). For a more general anthropological discussion of the distinctions between purity and holiness and their effect on societies see Mary Douglas *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, Boston, Melbourne: Ark Paperbacks [imprint Routledge, Kegan & Paul plc.], 1984

<sup>18</sup> He makes a connection between the transformation of relationships and the ‘highly dynamic’ life of communion, or Christian fellowship, advocated by Paul. *Op.cit* ‘What is the Anglican Communion for from a Theological Perspective’ p.3

<sup>19</sup> “The Anglican Communion is called to witness not to the truth it has constructed but what it has received.” *Op.cit* p.3

justified, but he also argues that Anglican teaching is severely compromised when ‘truth is beholden to geographical considerations .. the setting in which there is no truth except your truth and my truth’<sup>20</sup>. This seems to contradict the notion of permeability across boundaries and so denies the kind of ‘anarchic space’ which he originally advocated. It is not unreasonable to accuse all parties to the present conflict of separating the truth from the dynamic of the Spirit with the result that each particularity is reflected in what are essentially ‘static’ (and unholy) theologies and ways of thinking about the Church. This paralysing of the truth occurs when the ‘truth’ or ‘true’ Anglican teaching is appropriated by particular parties who each claim the right to a moral and/or spiritual high ground. As a result of this appropriation of the truth, party and issue based identities become an expression of a ‘truth’ which has been severed from the meaning which it should acquire in relationship with God and in relationships between persons. In terms of human relationship, this meaning is often discerned as a glimmer of understanding which ‘connects’ people at a deeper level in conversation. For the life of communion, as it is resourced from the activity of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, we experience such an understanding in the recognition of the integrity or ‘truthfulness’ of those with whom we disagree. The recognition has its source in God and so constitutes the transforming work of grace.

These considerations indicate the existence of a spiritual dimension to this conflict, as well as a social one, which the Communion is possibly ignoring. This being the case, Chris Sugden’s remarks allow us to perceive the risks to the spiritual life of communion posed by separation from God in relationship and in the doing of theology on two fronts: 1. As individualism (whether expressed in selective and arbitrary readings and interpretations of scripture, or in ‘constructed’ truth) which attenuates the link between Christian teaching and that of scripture. In both cases, the truth is ultimately appropriated and subsequently used to define the superior identity of one or other party and 2. As a result of the appropriation of the truth by separated parties, in a weakening of the vital connection which exists between the

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<sup>20</sup> Chris Sugden *op.cit* p.3

transformation of the whole Communion into a body which is deeply reconciled in Christ. Both cases would seem to indicate the need for a shared spiritual life which is resourced from a continuous re-engagement with scripture at a deeper intuitive level.

### *3:2 Truth and receptivity*

Reading scripture together at this deeper level requires a positive ‘receiving’ of the truth. It contrasts sharply with the exchanging of slogans, a sign of the breakdown of truthful dialogue in the life of the Anglican Communion at present. Being receptive to the truth by reading scripture in the desire to connect with its deepest meaning is not passivity, neither does it lead to ‘constructions’ of the truth. Instead, it requires a willingness on the part of the whole Communion to take active responsibility for understanding anew the word of God as it is received *by those with whom one disagrees*. In Laurence Freeman’s words, it is a listening which embodies the idea of discipleship: ‘To listen is not mere passivity. To listen is to turn towards another, to leave self behind; and that is to love.’<sup>21</sup> In the context of the crisis which currently dominates the life of the Anglican Communion, the listening and receiving process might begin with a de-centring of the collective self into the person of Christ.<sup>22</sup> Focusing on the identity of Jesus is helpful in this respect.

## **4. Who do you say that I am?**

The gospels portray the question of Christ’s own self understanding in two ways. The first in his relationship with the Father and the second in his understanding of his own identity in relation to those around him.<sup>23</sup> In both cases, identity hinges on

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<sup>21</sup> Laurence Freeman ‘And Who Do You Say That I am?’, *Jesus, The Teacher Within*, London: Continuum 2000

<sup>22</sup> This does not call for an annihilation of the self but a re-centring of the self within the transforming and redeeming person of the Crucified See Miroslav Volf *op.cit* ‘The Self and its Centre’ p.70ff.

<sup>23</sup> Of especial significance to this discussion is the way in which the identity of Jesus as it depends on his relationship with the Father is also *morally* defined as *doing* the Father’s will. John 5:30

relationship, with all the risks which relationships entail, rather than on a simple definition of what he represents or believes.<sup>24</sup>

#### *4:1 Identity and Discipleship*

His relationships with those around him also define the fundamental condition of Christian discipleship as one born of a self knowledge which requires self abandonment. This has nothing to do with ‘spiritual’ detachment from the real world. It is concerned with a deeper engagement with reality, as this is to be discovered in the neighbour’s need to know and to be known by God. In the life of communion, Christian identity is defined in terms of serving discipleship, but it is also one in which the Christian disciple is always open to Christ’s question, ‘Who do you say that I am?’. When a community is open to this question, separated parties begin to recognize the need for Christ in one another, and in so doing are able to discern an enduring truth in a new way. In the context of the present conflict, rediscovering the truth in the need for God which the other experiences, also allows party identities to be released from the kind of individualism which Chris Sugden describes. Rediscovering the truth in a new way allows the glimmer of understanding experienced in truthful exchange to reconnect different perceptions of truth with the transforming work of God’s Spirit which is at work in the whole Communion. This forms the basis for reconciliation.

#### *4:2 Truth and Reconciliation*

Reconciliation, as well as the deepening or renewal of existing friendships, now provides a new foundation on which to establish relationships of trust in which the truth might be discerned in who the other understands Jesus to be.<sup>25</sup> These relationships might later enrich the spirituality of the whole community, returning

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<sup>24</sup> Self descriptive statements in the St. John’s gospel, for example, are invariably directly connected to specific events or people.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the way in which interrogation functions as the basis for new ways of seeing salvation in the face of Christ as it is discerned in the face and habits of the other see David Ford. ‘Facing’ in *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 especially ch. 1

wisdom and understanding to the heart of its collective and individual life in the Spirit. In this way, it might be possible for the life of the Church as communion to be renewed in relationship and resourced from its inner life, allowing for a recognising of Christ, and of the truth, as being embodied in his question, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ It is a question which, as I have sought to demonstrate, can only be fully answered by embracing the understanding of Jesus which others have.

This is worked out in a continued process of growth in self understanding and is linked to the discovery of meaning as this is found in the truth perceived by others. I therefore equate meaning with the transforming of belief into an ‘understanding’ of faith acquired in communion. The foregoing discussion suggests that this understanding is closely related to the way in which identities are freed into a new and dynamic life of communion as a result of the movement inherent in the reconciliation process. Meaning begins from the same principle of recognition and receptivity which governs the relationship between Jesus and the Father,<sup>26</sup> so that in Christ’s relationship with the Father, the rational process is also given meaning in relationship. It is a dynamic relationship involving the will to continually go forward to meet the other in a covenant of exchange which is worked out in dialogue. Separated parties in the Anglican Communion are invited to participate in this relationship at the deepest level and, as a result of this depth and dynamic of participation, to re-discover the meaning and purpose which is defined through different ways of believing the same truth, a believing which defines their specifically Christian identity.

For this reason Chris Sugden is right, with respect to the task which the Commission faces, to suggest that ‘different narratives about the mission of God and human freedom underlie this conflict’. However, his understanding of narrative, and of the root cause of the conflict, rests on the ‘biblical reasons’ which inform particular understandings of scripture and of the nature of the conflict itself. This confining of truth to ‘biblical reasons’ disallows a free questioning of scripture, or the questioning of scripture in depth and from the real experiences of untidy human relationships. The

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<sup>26</sup> John 13:20.

same is true of the untidiness of relationship with God as this is worked out in the daily fluctuations of a life of prayer.

Furthermore, if narrative is to a limited extent an expression of identity and of a person's understanding of the way God questions him in his own predicament, there is no reason to suppose that there ought not to be more than one narrative, or one understanding of God as a single answer to the question 'Who do you say that I am?'. This supposition is neither 'constructive' of the truth, or individualistic, since the question needs to be heard with the kind of expectations of a particular person which Jesus himself had. That is to say, he questions a specific and particular person, whose context is coloured by a particular history. Narrative can therefore only be understood in contextual terms. It is composed of all the events and circumstances in a person's life and will affect the answer which she gives to the question 'Who do you say that I am?'.

Parties and groupings also have their collective and individual contexts which shape their answers to this question and so place their understanding of who they are in the self understanding of Christ. This, as we have seen, is both a relational and dynamic process, a freeing of identities into his abiding presence who is a continuing outworking of God's will and purpose in the life of the Communion.

### **5 Freeing into unity – Some practical suggestions**

The foregoing discussion suggests that if unity in communion is to be more than one of superficial politeness, a way needs to be found whereby identities might be sought anew in God himself, through a genuine experience of what it means to be the body of Christ. The conclusions I have drawn during the course of the discussion suggest that prior to reaching a long term agreement about the structural and political future of the Communion as a whole, the fragmenting of the Communion's life together might need to be addressed from the kind of intuitive perspective which begins with rediscovering a commonality of identity in Jesus Christ. This would involve surrendering issues and narratives which simply reinforce *a priori* held

positions, with a view to rediscovering in relationship new narratives embodying a fuller truth about the way forward for the Communion. As I have already suggested, this could be done with the help of mentors, one to one spiritual directors or chaplains.

I am conscious of the fact that the suggestions put forward in this paper may appear presumptuous, or that they may be superfluous, but I believe that they offer a way forward for the Anglican Communion, in its present divided state, to surrender party and issue based identities and rediscover a commonality of truth in a deeper life of the spirit. This in turn might enable the Communion to forge a deeper unity for its life, despite the structural separation which might yet occur in the aftermath of the Commission's discussions.

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